

# Air-to-air refuelling: giving wings to European capabilities self-sufficiency

## A Pooling & Sharing initiative

On 30 November 2011 the Steering Board endorsed eleven Pooling & Sharing opportunities; tasked EDA to identify new opportunities in areas such as training, maintenance and logistics and cooperative approaches for areas of operational capability; and agreed to evaluate progress at its next meeting with a view to establishing further commitments to Pooling & Sharing.

One of these areas is Air-to-air refuelling.

## The operational need

Air-to-Air Refuelling (AAR) is a critical enabler for air power projection and it is required to enable anything beyond short range air combat operations. A unique force multiplier, it is a fundamental capability embedded in modern aircraft design, not just in combat aircraft, but across the full spectrum of air platforms – including in the near future Unmanned Aerial Vehicles.

In the past, European armed forces have relied substantively on American assets. This was originally demonstrated in the Kosovo Campaign, and the increased reliance on the US was a lesson from operations over Libya.

Europe can field 42 aircraft of 10 different types, which compares with US resources of over 650 of 4 types.

As AAR is a major capability shortfall that can be ameliorated through a wide series of European options, significant commitment is expected.

## The initiative

**Aim:** To increase the European Air-to-Air Refuelling capacity by promoting different options for pooling and/or sharing of Air-to-Air Refuelling assets or services.

**Benefits:** To alleviate the existing European Air-to-Air Refuelling shortfall and to make the acquisition/operation of an Air-to-Air Refuelling capability more affordable for pMS. Pooling of demand for commercial options will reduce costs, leasing existing capability will lead to income generation for those with assets, and procuring a range of assets together from A400M conversion equipment to Airbus A330s will enhance capability. Sharing of existing capabilities will allow for potential savings.

## Progress & EDA's role

Air-to-Air Refuelling represents a major opportunity for European cooperation in a European solution.

For the 2020 time-frame and beyond, increasing strategic tanker capacity is attracting significant interest.

A major impulse has been given by the European Defence Agency Steering board, on 22 March 2012. In this respect, Ministers endorsed a Political Declaration regarding Air-to-Air Refuelling declaring their willingness to support further development of these capabilities and to better coordinate them. Ministers consider that Air-to-Air refuelling capabilities should be developed in Europe as a matter of priority; and that these capabilities should be made available for potential use on EU, NATO, or other operations. France, Germany and the Netherlands are strongly and firmly committed to this project, and stand ready to take leading responsibilities with the support of the EDA.

EDA will support Member States in developing interoperable European solutions to overcome current shortfalls in air-to-air refuelling, and propose options for future requirements in this respect, including:

- for the short-term, the wider use of existing capabilities building on existing procedures and models.
- for new and enhanced capability delivery in the timeframe of 2020 and beyond, a range of both acquisition and commercial options and rationalisation of through-life costs through greater efficiencies and economies of scale (including sharing of infrastructure, maintenance, logistic support, basing, training).

### Air-to-air refueling at a glance

**TODAY:** characterized by huge shortfall (80% of Libya sorties – same in Kosovo flown by US assets) and huge fleet fragmentation (too many types – microfleets) of the European capacities resulting in an even more reduced overall efficiency (both from an operational and cost point of view).

**TOMORROW:** work will be done to take stock of the progressive fielding out of old platforms and of the Libya lessons; of the planned procurement programs; and of the more versatile/multirole future platforms, in order to pool future fleets, establish synergies with existing pooled military organisations, in order to achieve a balanced combination of tactical/strategic platforms and systems.